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ABSTRACT

Career exploration typically involves the investigation of personal factors: interests, aptitudes, values, and personal style. This digest outlines one counseling method, pattern identification exercise (PIE). PIE starts with past experiences and identifies personal patterns which are relevant to career decisions. A premise of PIE is that experiences which form the basis for career exploration can come from any aspect of life. A collaborative working relationship between counselor and client must be maintained throughout the process. The number of experiences to be analyzed varies, depending on motivation level and the amount of time available. Typically, the analysis would not extend beyond two or three experiences. Steps in conducting PIE involve asking the client to think about some activity from leisure, education, or work, which is particularly enjoyable. The client then describes in detail the positive and negative aspects of the activity. After a full discussion, the client then considers the types of patterns suggested by the information. At this point, the counselor can provide some input and reframe the discussion. Finally, the counselor and client can connect the above information and analyze career themes. PIE encourages clients to engage in activities which provide insights and which promote ongoing self-analysis. (RJM)

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by Norm Amundson

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ERIC DIGEST

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Pattern Identification Exercise

Norm Amundson

Overview

Career exploration typically involves the investigation of personal factors: interests, aptitudes, values, and personal style.(Amundson, 1989). This investigation along with labor-market considerations, can require considerable time, particularly if counselors use qualitative or standardized measures to investigate each factor. Given the time limitations of most counseling situations, and the desire to be efficient and comprehensive, there is a growing need for new methods of career assessment (Amundson, in press; Eckert, 1993). One such approach-the pattern identification exercise (PIE)-has been used effectively in both individual and group career counseling (Amundson & Cochran, 1984; Amundson & Stone, 1992). PIE starts with past experiences and, through an in-depth questioning process, seeks to identify personal patterns which are of relevance in establishing career pathways.

Discussion

The guided inquiry procedure, developed in the field of rhetoric by Young, Becker, and Pike (1970), served as a starting point to develop the PIE method. These authors used a wide range of perspectives and questions to explore and understand new languages and situations. This was the stimulus for a structured questioning method (PIE) which could be utilized in career exploration.

A premise underlying PIE is that the experiences which form the basis for career exploration can come from *any* aspect of life. The experiences of each person are unique and a detailed and careful examination of these experiences will reveal some common life patterns. To illustrate, a leisure activity, such as playing tennis, can be appreciated for its social elements, the physical activity, the opportunity for competition, or some other reason. The way in which a person plays (during good times and during challenges) may reflect patterns about motivation, planning, attitude, and self-concept. Uncovering these patterns can reveal important personal insights which have direct relevance to career choice, job search, and job satisfaction.

This process of exploring experiences is as important as the questions which are used to stimulate discussion. The client is actively involved in the generation of information, the interpretation of meaning, and the application of new insights. A collaborative working relationship between counselor and client must be maintained throughout (Gelso & Carter, 1985). The client is respected as the final authority in the identification of patterns. The counselor has an opportunity to provide input, but this is always done in a tentative manner, after the client has had a full opportunity to identify patterns.

The number of experiences to be analyzed varies, depending on motivation level and the amount of time available. Typically, the analysis would not extend beyond two or three experiences. Each analysis has the potential to add new patterns, but there also will be considerable overlap. The counselor plays an important role in introducing the exercise, but the expectation is that the client will be able to work independently or with other people in a group to conduct further analyses. The client is learning a method of inquiry in addition to learning how to identify particular patterns.

Steps In Conducting PIE

PIE involves client and counselor in a defined exploration sequence. A considerable amount of information is generated prior to identifying patterns. It is often helpful for the counselor to take notes. If note-taking is used, it should be discussed with the client who should have full access to the information.

The steps of inquiry which characterize PIE are as follows:

1. Ask the client to think about some activity from leisure, education, or work which is particularly enjoyable. Ask the client to think about a time when this activity was very enjoyable and a time when the activity was less enjoyable.

2. Have the client sequentially describe in detail the positive and negative experiences. Some open-ended questions can be asked at this point to facilitate a full description. Some of the issues to explore include the people involved, feelings, thoughts, challenges, successes, and motivations. Also, what are the dynamics that differentiate the positive and negative dynamics? Depending on the situation, it may be helpful to question some of the contextual issues. Questions in this regard focus on how the client's interest developed over time and what the client projects for the future.

3. After a full discussion, have the client consider what types of patterns are suggested by the information. Give the client every opportunity to make connections and pro-

vide him or her ongoing support and encouragement. Ask how each specific piece of information reflects something about the client (i.e., goals, values, aptitudes, personal style, interests).

4. At this point, the counselor can provide some input. Counselor statements should be tentative and linked positively with client comments. While this can be an opportunity for reframing, it is important not to lose sight of the client's contribution.

5. Connecting the above information and analysis to specific career themes can now be addressed. As above, the client speaks first, followed by the counselor. The question here is how personal information relates to career choice and action planning.

The above sequence of inquiry can be repeated for several activities. The counselor serves as a guide for the analysis, but at some point clients should be encouraged to conduct their own independent inquiry (perhaps as a homework assignment).

In group counseling, the counselor starts by demonstrating the inquiry process with a member of the group. Participants are then paired off and instructed to follow the steps of analysis with one another. The counselor serves as a consultant while the members discuss and analyze their experiences. After a designated period of time, the group comes together for debriefing.

Positive reports have been obtained from a wide range of clients. Comments often refer to the surprisingly potent nature of the activity, particularly when focusing on leisure activities which initially seemed of little consequence. When teaching the PIE method to counselors, it has been important to illustate the activity through experiential exercises. As with clients, the counselors have been impressed with the quality and quantity of information that con be generated through the intensive examination of relatively innocuous experiences.

Conclusion

PIE represents a comprehensive method for exploring career themes in that is uses experiences as the raw material for analysis. Exploration is client-centered, with the counselor assuming a facilitative rather than an "expert" stance. Through this mode of inquiry the client identifies patterns of action which relate to goals, values, interests, aptitudes, and personal style.

There are several advantages to using the PIE approach. The most obvious advantage is that PIE offers one procedure to evaluate the client's interests and values. The inquiry has credibility since it is based on life experiences, which are interpreted and validated by the client. Through this approach, clients engage in an activity which not only provides insights, but also teaches a procedure for ongoing self-analysis.

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